

Young Somali Women's Individual and Collective Understanding of Cultural and Religious Identity through Narrative Participatory Photography

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I. Introduction

Dumarka Soomaaliyeed Voices Unveiled (DSVU) is a narrative participatory photography project that engaged young Somali women in photography and storytelling to create an exhibit exploring participants' experiences of being Muslim Somali women in the diaspora. This method was developed by participants throughout the course of the project and has roots in participatory action research methodology as well as other arts initiatives within the Somali diaspora. This article will define narrative participatory photography and offer a framework for future arts-based research initiatives within the diaspora. I will situate this project among other arts initiatives in the Somali diaspora as important sites for the research of Somali experiences of diasporic identity. Finally, a photo-essay of selected work from the exhibit offers an example of this methodology at work and presents the way in which this research study engages cultural and religious identity amongst young Somali women in the diaspora.

II. DSVU: A Narrative Participatory Photography Project

DSVU began in 2012 as a response to the call for more women's narratives (Crosby 2006), the need for more public education of host communities about their new neighbors (Ali 2009; Roble and Rutledge 2008; Schaid and Grossman 2007), and the sociocultural context of Columbus, Ohio (Moore and Joseph 2011; Roble and Rutledge 2008;

Waters 2012). Columbus is home to a large population of Somali residents; the actual size is unknown and debated, with numbers ranging from 15,000 to 75,000 (CRP 2009; Moore and Joseph 2011; ODPS 2013; SCAO 2005; Waters 2012). Somalis began arriving in 1994, although most came to Columbus as a result of secondary and chain migrations beginning in the early 2000s as they learned of affordable and safe housing, jobs, and better living conditions, and joined family members and earlier arrivals already residing there. Upon arrival, many Somalis were faced with anti-Somali ideologies, Islamophobia, and a host of misunderstandings regarding their culture and religion. Despite the development of social service agencies, increased participation in local government, local educational efforts such as Moore and Joseph's (2011) cultural training for public school teachers, and arts-based efforts such as the Columbus-based Somali Documentary Project (Roble and Rutledge 2008), common stereotypes and misrepresentations rooted in a general lack of knowledge about Somali women in particular persist. DSVU offers young Somali women an opportunity to identify issues of importance and present their perspectives through writing and photography in a public exhibition.

The exhibit is the culmination of a series of meetings in which the participating women discussed topics of interest, took photographs, read poems and essays, and shared stories of their experiences. Meetings were recorded and transcribed in order to document the oral narratives and dialogue, which formed the basis of the exhibit's organization. Participants then chose photographs and stories to include in the exhibition; categorized their selections into themes of vocation, culture, religion, dress, and community; and decided on forms of presentation. This co-curation occurred on a private Facebook group page, where participants posted and discussed their work. That forum enabled participation even if women were unable to attend meetings in person. The exhibit has been displayed at five libraries in central Ohio. Photography workshops, bilingual story times, and poetry readings took place in tandem with the exhibit.

The project evolved as relationships developed between participants and I, through a method of recruitment that I call *community invitation*, a form of snowball sampling (Stringer 2007); the choice of participatory and narrative forms of research; and the involvement of participants as co-researchers. Participants chose the topics of inquiry for their discussions, writing, and photography, which included the stereotypes and misconceptions that they have encountered among non-Somalis,

experiences of transitioning from girls to women, the effects that their parents' experiences have had on their lives, and the role of religion in their understanding and practice of Somali culture. In addition, a goal of community edification emerged as we chose to write, talk, and take photographs about issues of identity negotiation and representation. Ultimately, we created this exhibit to (1) educate others about the lives and experiences of young Somali women, (2) challenge stereotypes, misconceptions, and expectations, and (3) present a fluid and more complex representation of Somali women.

The process used to create exhibit materials evolved with participant input and centralized storytelling and photography. I call this method *narrative participatory photography*. In the following sections, I describe the foundations of this method, which include participatory action research and photovoice, other arts initiatives in the Somali diaspora, and the participants' own inclination towards poetry, essay, storytelling, and photography.

III. DSVU Participants

Fourteen women participated in DSVU from 2012 to 2014. At the time of participation, they ranged in age from 18 to 31 years. All were enrolled in higher education including community college, nursing school, state university, and graduate school, in a variety of fields like education, social work, medicine, political science, and international studies. The women of DSVU were either born in the United States or came here when they were quite young. Consequently, they have spent the majority of their lives (if not all of it) in the diaspora. Several have visited Africa, and one woman moved to Somalia shortly after participating in the project. Although age, socioeconomic status, and migration history establishes a common background, this project in no way claims to represent all young Somali women and instead offers a partial account of their experiences in the diaspora.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a qualitative research methodology that engages participants in the research process and has explicitly educative and political aims (Hunter, Emerald, and Martin 2013). In PAR, researchers work *with* participants to determine topics of inquiry, research methods, participant/researcher roles, and the analysis and presentation of data. PAR is often visualized as a look, think, act cycle, which perpetuates itself as the researcher works in and with the community (Stringer 2007). For the purposes of my work, PAR

has three foundational values including relationship building, community education, and political action (Chatterton, Fuller, and Routledge 2007; Hunter et al. 2013; McIntyre 2008; Stringer 2007). These principles guided the development of DSVU, as well as the narrative participatory photography method employed.

Photovoice is a PAR method that emerged from the women's health field. It engages research participants in photography to explore community issues and document community assets through a series of meetings and discussions (Wang 1999). Wang (1999) and Krieg and Roberts (2007) outline the basic phases, which include (1) identifying audience, selecting participants, discussing themes and topics of investigation, and taking photographs; (2) selecting, interpreting, and discussing photographs; (3) contextualizing photographs through group discussion and voicing individual and group experience; and (4) codifying photographs and identifying achievable target actions from the emergent issues, themes, and/or theories. While there are a number of notable photovoice studies (Krieg and Roberts 2007; Lykes 2001; McIntyre 2003; Prins 2010; Wang 1999; 2006), there remains a great deal of trial and error in its utilization. For DSVU, this flexibility enabled a more immediate response to participants' interests and culture.

IV. Storytelling and Documentary Photography

Storytelling is a dominant form of cultural expression in Somali society (Afrax 2010; Ahmed n.d.), and a prevalent practice among project participants like Kayla, whose spoken word poem about Somali identity propelled other participants to contribute poems and essays, in addition to their oral histories, to the final exhibit.¹ Thus, the women of DSVU join others like Ifrah Magan (2012) in highlighting the stories of Somali refugees to document a more accurate picture of Somali culture and affirm the importance of stories. With the importance of storytelling, poetry, and writing among participants, we found it necessary to employ storytelling as well as photography in DSVU.

There is a strong tradition of documentary photography and narrative as a means of public education and action among arts initiatives with immigrants at large (for example Lehrer and Sloan's (2003) *Crossing the BLVD*) and more importantly within the Somali diaspora.² Initiatives such as the Somali Documentary Project (Roble and Rutledge, 2008), Glenn Jordan's Somali Elders project (Jordan 2007; 2008), and Mohamud Mumin's work with young Somali males in Minneapolis

document the stories of Somalis in the diaspora as well as educate American communities about their new neighbors. The Somali Documentary Project in particular aims to document the history of the diaspora as it happens through photography and film, mentor young Somali artists, and educate others about and advocate for Somalia and Somalis in the diaspora. Mumin's "*The Youth/Dhallinyarada*," a group of in-depth portraits of thirteen young Somali men in Minnesota "who are actively and positively engaged in their community" (Mumin n.d.), incorporates an exhibition, a tabloid-sized newspaper, and a multimedia piece in which participants share their experiences of coming to Minnesota and the challenges they face negotiating belonging in America, engaging in their community, and being Somali. Other artists, like Nadia Faragaab, take up Somali identity in the diaspora through more traditional gallery works; however, the dual aims of education and providing a platform for engaging the artist and others in identity negotiation through art making remain a driving force. The ethnographic tendencies of these works deserve more scholarly attention for their insights into individual and group experiences of the diaspora and diasporic identity. Moreover, the goals of edification and identity exploration through multiple forms of art making provide a foundation for DSVU.

Narrative participatory photography bridges the strengths of photovoice and narrative to more fully represent the experiences of the participants. It is a culturally relevant synthesis of Somali tradition and PAR methods intending to foster change within a community by increasing knowledge about and relationships among young Somali women. The collaborative and inter-genre nature of narrative participatory photography is an example of *crystallization* (Richardson 1994), a framework for qualitative research that provides a deepened, complex, yet admittedly partial understanding of the topic under study by drawing on literary, artistic, and scientific genres. Ellingson (2009) describes crystallization as utilizing multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation to develop a coherent text or series of related texts and build a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon (p. 4). Though from ethnography, crystallization recognizes the benefits of drawing from all genres on the qualitative spectrum and recognizes the usefulness of presenting poetry alongside grounded theory or narrative with more traditional methods of analysis such as coding and categorization. Thus, narrative participatory photography is a culturally relevant method that emphasizes storytelling and

photography to explore community issues through collaborative art making, utilizes co-curation and writing (including poetry) as forms of analysis, and considers multiple audiences and modes of presentation.

V. "Religion and Culture Go Hand in Hand, But They Don't Always Agree"

A foundational element of Somali identity and culture is religion. All of the women in DSVU identify as Muslim, and their experiences support what Tiilikainen (2007) found among Somali women in Finland: that despite differences, because they are minorities in a non-Muslim society, "Somali women and their families share the challenge to more consciously than before consider the importance of their Muslim background" (p. 207). Islam is a uniting factor among Somalis in the diaspora as many have found (Berns-McGown 1999; 2007; and Tiilikainen 2007), especially among youth (Omar 2012), and is a means of religious and cultural reproduction and maintaining ethnic identity (Tiilikainen 2007). Berns-McGown (1999) found that Somali women in Toronto and London were particularly involved in redefining Islamic practice and the transfer of ideas. This was also the case among the women of DSVU, who took up the consideration of their religious identification and the ways that it informs, challenges, and alters their understanding and practice of their Somali identity as minorities in a Midwestern city.

Among the women, the conflation of religion and culture is a particularly pertinent topic. Many conversations deconstructed cultural traditions such as gender roles, dress, and behavior expectations often justified with religion. The women consciously considered the importance of the choices they make about everyday living as Muslims and as Somalis in America, and shared their experiences of overlapping and often conflicting Somali, Muslim, and American practices. Through personal study and interpretation of the Qur'an, interfacing with other young Muslim women, and recognizing the decisions they are making about vocation, dress, behavior, and even participation in activities such as this project, they are redefining both religious and cultural practices. This redefinition affects changing gender roles and also, as Boyle and Ali (2010) found, the cultural divide between Somalis in the United States and Somalis in Somalia. The conscientious negotiation of identity is seen in the intentional sharing throughout the process of creating the exhibit as well as the consideration of the representations

of identity evident in curatorial choices. The writing and photographs in the exhibit are thus a visual analysis of how the women understand their cultural and religious identities.

DSVU offers a unique look at the specific experiences of women encountering religious and cultural practices, discussing these issues, and responding to them through writing and photography. Two methods of analysis utilized are co-curation and writing. In the photo-essay, excerpts from the DSVU exhibit related to culture and religion are included. The photographs and stories were chosen and categorized by participants. Direct excerpts from participants' stories are presented in italics. I also include two of my own analytic poems, whose words and stories are taken directly from transcripts of project meetings. Though not included in the original exhibit, these poems were constructed according to major themes identified by participants, draw connections between meetings and different forms of narrative, and preserve the rhythm of the dialogue amongst participants.

A Photo-Essay of Culture and Religion in DSVU



Figure 1: (2013) Miriam works at Focus Learning Academy, a charter school that many Somali youth attend. She is outspoken about the double standards regarding gender, particularly evident in dress and behavior expectations within the Somali community in Columbus.

Religious Knowledge³

On Saturday and Sunday,
Mom drops you off at *duqsi*.
You stay there a couple or three hours.
You recite the Quran.
You get a passage.
You memorize this.
You pass it to the teacher and he gives you a new passage to
memorize.
It's that kind of thing.
And when it comes to behavior, the *duqsi* is the backup enforcer.

They also have *halaqa*. It just means circle of knowledge.
It's like everyone knows a little bit of something.
So when you're sitting in that circle and share that little bit of
knowledge you know even if it's just a single verse, and then everyone
adds on to it. So the sharing is really informal.

And then there are actual classes, where it's structured.
Where there's the sole teacher, the scholar who knows what they're
talking about.
You take notes, you take tests.
It's like school for anyone, any age. You can start whenever.
Like maybe you weren't religious when you were younger and maybe
you are fifty-something now—you can go to the class.

When I was younger, I studied the Quran as all Somalis do,
But it was mostly Arabic memorization of the text.
The first time I actually paid attention to the words was in an English
translation.
It had a transformative effect.
I was reading passages that really spoke to me as somebody just
coming from adolescence
Who had dealt with a lot of angst and identity issues and everything.
Passages that talk about patience.
Passages that talk about the experiences of the prophets.
And really finding a text that spoke to me in my own experiences and
my own situations.

So really, the Quran and other texts about Islam and the five pillars were fundamental.

But you know how the religion is practiced by many different people and cultures?

In our Somali community you're expected to know these things by a certain age.

I remember when I was ten years old, an old man came —

My mom used to have one of those little stores

I was holding down the store for her and he came in

—He asked, "Hey what chapter, how far have you memorized?"

And I kind of felt embarrassed because I didn't memorize much at that time.

And for some reason I felt like lying to him because I knew that he wouldn't be happy with the real answer.

So I said that I memorized up to Surah Ya Sin.

I remember the specific chapter I had told him.

And the chapter Ya Sin is very, in my opinion, very well progressed.

Like if we had memorized that amount by the age ten, two claps.

You're a prodigy, that's my opinion.

But to this old man,

Although I gave him that high chapter

He looked at me as if it were not enough.

He said, "Only Chapter Ya Sin?"

"What have your parents been doing?"

"Why have you not memorized more?"

And in my head I'm thinking:

If only he knew the truth of how much I really memorized.

That's so true.

I remember this past summer —

So one of my cousins, he's eight. He finished the entire Quran, he has it memorized. And I can't even get past the very beginning. We'll leave it at that.

—So I'm over in Somalia like, "I'm in college, I graduated high school a year early."

"How far are you in the Quran?"

"Well, we don't talk about that in public."



Figure 2: (2014) Dresses on display at Global Mall, a Somali mall in Columbus, Ohio. There is a wide range of dress among young women—from jeans to a long skirt or abaya. Dress is often dependent on place. For example, several of the women described the pressure to wear full hijab to Somali malls and certain mosques, but might only wear a headscarf to other places like work or school. For more on dress in the diaspora, see Akou (2004).

And they were like, “Uh Sophia what have you been teaching your daughter?”

“Uh you know, um, she knows a lot.”

“How far is she?”

“We don’t talk about that.”

But yeah.

Between work and school it’s hard to find to find the time.

I think it just has to do with me becoming more dedicated to my religion.

It has to do with me uplifting, lifting my *iman*.

Let’s say that.

I just feel that right now I’m just busy with school and work and stuff,



Figure 3: (2013) Nasra studying. Nasra recently completed her Master of Social Work degree, and is now working with children and youth in Columbus, Ohio. Many of the women expressed vocational goals focused on giving back to their community by improving life in the diaspora or participating in reconstruction efforts in Somalia through politics, law, health care, and education.



Figure 4: (2013) Prayers at Noor Mosque, Hilliard, Ohio. There are several mosques in central Ohio, including many Somali mosques. Noor serves a diverse population of Muslims.

that I just don't have the time to like sit down at the mosque and just listen to a lecture, you know?
So it just has to do with me working on it.

And I know it's not a good enough answer
But I try to find time if there is something happening at the *masjid*.
But I'm not going to lie; I memorize One Direction lyrics faster than my Quran.
You can ask me who sang what solo but you can't ask me what chapter in the Quran it is.
It's not going to work out too good.

I went to Somalia for a month. It was the biggest culture shock I ever faced. I could never do anything right. The word I heard the most was "outsider." Diaspora, the outsider.

The minute I stepped off the plane, there were two lines—the foreigner line and the naturalized citizen line. I thought, "I'm Somali. I'm in Somalia.



Figure 5: (2013) Qorsho folding clothes to send to Somalia. The mosque collects clothing and book donations, sends them when someone flies to Kenya or Somalia, and pays for the baggage fees. Helping with the clothing donations is something Qorsho does with her mother, and is a way to give back, an important pillar of Islam.

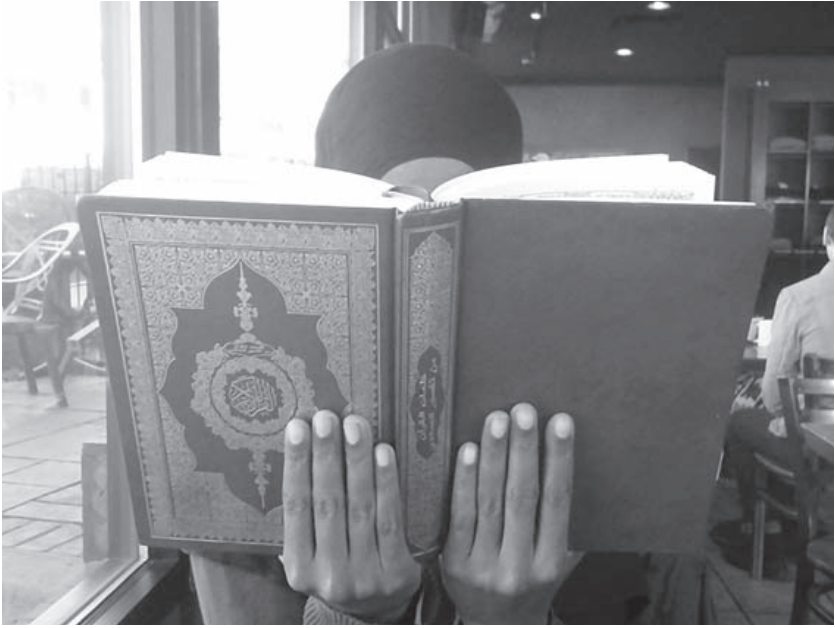


Figure 6: (2013) S. reading the Quran. Two participants requested their face not be shown in photographs, due to religious beliefs. Though most participants did not feel this was an issue, or that there was a problem considering this project as art, in the course of obtaining funding for the project, I was told to describe the work as documentary rather than art to circumvent religious prohibitions on image making.

I'm going to go in the right line." As I'm walking through the line they said, "What are you doing here? You're a diaspora."

"No, I'm Somali."

"It doesn't matter if you're Somali, or if you were born here. If you don't have the passport you can't stand in this line."

"Oh, ok. Where do I go stand?"

And they were like, "Go stand with the other foreigners." (Asha)

What does it mean for me to be Somali? I don't know the answer to that. Our culture is everything. Our culture ties a lot in with our religion. Our language is everything. It's the way we think, it's the way we act upon things. It is our mentality. (Muna)



Figure 7: (2014) Asha, Zam Zam, A. Miriam, and Bahja at Easton Towne Center. As we took photographs together at the shopping center, the women discussed the contrast between their appearance and that of the models in advertisements for stores such as Victoria's Secret and American Girl.

Though aware of the differences between American social norms and common assumptions regarding citizenship, the young women spent their time window shopping, trying on makeup, and having fun with friends.

Blurred Lines⁴

Oh religion?

In our culture in our community, there's a blurred line.

Religion and culture go hand in hand,

But they don't always agree

And some people tend to choose culture over religion.

Or they say the culture is the religion.

They develop strategies to resist the loss of tradition.

Justification.

Like boys being judged less harshly or saying we can't.

That's culture.

That's culture but some people will try to play it off as religion.



Figure 8: (2013) Hoda praying. For Hoda, like many others, studying the Quran and getting involved at the mosque is an important part of being Somali as well as Muslim.

The Quran clearly states that we're equal and if anything we have the upper hand.

It says, "Heaven's under your mother's foot."

And the Prophet, As-Salaam "Alaykom," he said, "A warning, a little advice: Be nice to your women, your daughters, your mothers, your sisters. We wouldn't exist without them."

Exactly.

But then they tried to say guys have higher status.

They try to belittle our status although so much is expected from us.

There are a lot of women that carry their families on their backs.

They are the breadwinners and take care of the children.

It is a cultural shift.

But the men don't see that

And they don't appreciate us so they just try to belittle us.

And they say that's a woman's job, a woman's work,

A woman *is* to cook and clean.

But I wasn't born to do this.

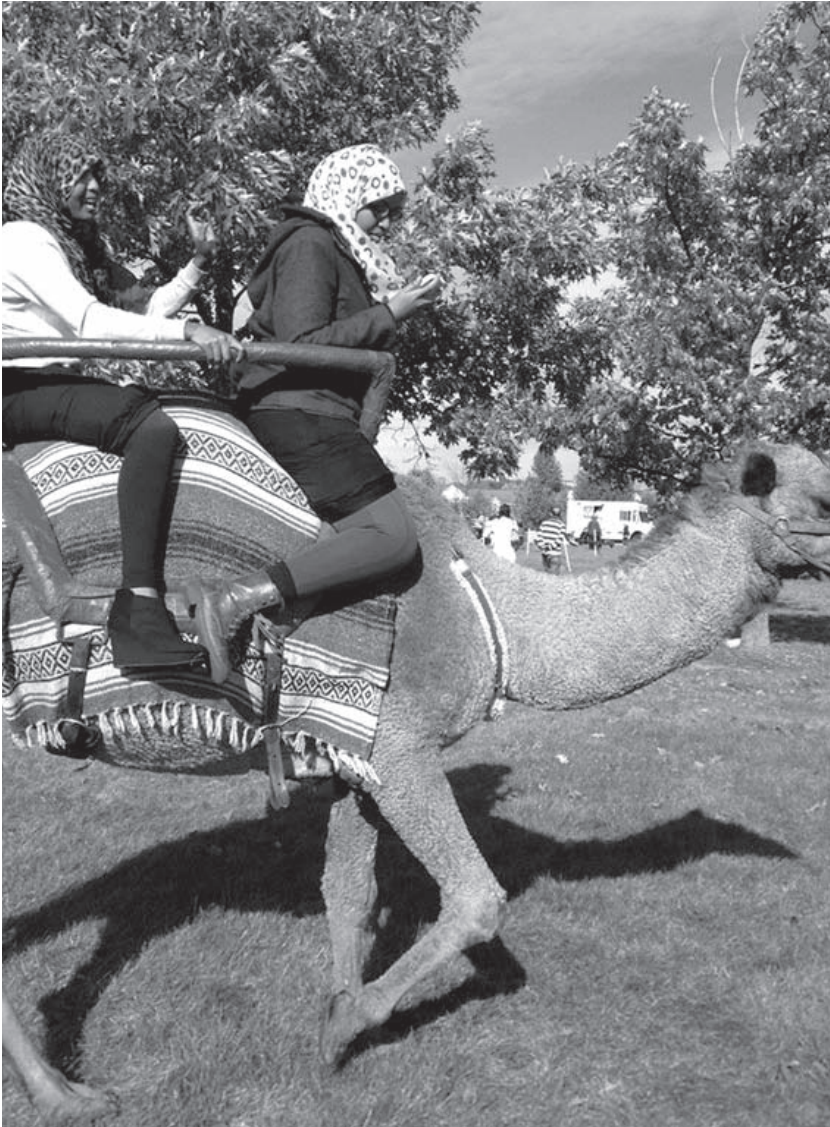


Figure 9: (2014) Miriam and Zahra's first camel ride during Eid Festival at Noor Mosque, Hilliard, Ohio.



Figure 10: (2013) Muna putting on hijab. Muna was the only participant in DSVU who did not wear hijab, although she tried it for a year at the encouragement of a friend. When she saw the friend switching back to her old ways, Muna decided to take it off and only wear it again when it comes from the heart. However, she does wear a headscarf when attending mosque or when she visits Somali malls. Many of the women shared their hijab stories.

I learned.

So if you give it effort and time, you might learn it.

But no, they don't want it.

They're like, it's not my place.

It's not *my* place.

I think the hardest thing for me as a Somali woman is balancing the culture and the religion. Sometimes it clashes. Sometimes you don't know where the boundary ends and there are moments when I can get away with culture. But then I look back and I know what is wrong and right in the religion. (Miriam)

I am a Somali girl living in America. Being a Somali girl in the West is hard to balance. The kids at school would tease me often for being foreign. They would pick on my headscarf. I think I began to resent my ethnicity. I hated the fact that I was born Somali. I wished I could just be American. My attitude became unbearable even to me. But I started doing some more soul searching and reconnected with my religion. When I became more religiously devout it translated into my dealings with everyone at school and within myself. I began to accept my culture and appreciate who I am. In my home I became a better daughter and sister. I learned from Islam to be grateful for everything in my life. I also learned to treat my parents with the most kindness and respect. It gave me balance. Balance with my surrounding. It gave me understanding and made me more cautious of the world. So the bridge that brought my life together was Islam. (Ladan)

VI. Addressing Religious and Cultural Identity through Photography and Writing

Storytelling and photography give insight into the experience of negotiating the complex relationship between culture and religion. Displaying multiple images and accounts illustrates a range of religious and cultural identification and practices even within a small group of young women. Many of the participants found that personal study of the Quran helped them to better understand their identity as not only Muslims, but also as Somalis. They see themselves as ambassadors for their religion and their culture, and their participation in this project is a testament to this. While some of the women strongly identify with their religion, others have more affinity with American pop culture, as seen in the end of the poem "Religious Knowledge." Yet each has a concern for separating culture and religion, and acknowledging where

one informs the other. The poem “Blurred Lines” offers an example of how the women distinguish between cultural and religious foundations for gender roles. The poems, photographs, and stories elaborate on what Berns-McGown (1991; 2007), Tiilikainen (2007), and Boyle and Ali (2010) found in other locales in the diaspora. Study of the complex relationship between cultural and religious identities requires a framework for research that attends to the deep, complex, and partial understandings of the topic (Richardson and St. Pierre 2005, p. 963) through multiple modes of analysis and presentation.

As Muslim Somali women living in the West, the women of DSVU are in a unique position to deconstruct the multiple identities that they claim. In many discussions, the women identified the source of many of their practices, ultimately choosing what to follow and what to leave behind in each of their overlapping cultural and religious identities. The multiple and often conflicting representations of this topic challenges any notion of a single story, as evident in their words and visually juxtaposed in their photographs. The photographs do not immediately suggest a tension between religion and culture—none of their expressions demonstrate conflict, reservation, or even a suggestion of turmoil. The images instead present women who are contemplative; committed to practicing their faith through prayer, study, dress, and giving back to others; and open to sharing their experiences of negotiating cultural and religious identity. Muna, for instance, is seen putting on her *hijab* even though she talks about choosing not to do so until she is ready despite cultural expectations (Figure 10). There are also elements of playfulness in many of the images, such as the women spending time together while shopping (Figure 7). However, the words between reveal more nuance and consideration of their place between Somalia and the United States, secular life and Muslim practice, and public and private spaces. For example, the sequence of Ladan’s narrative about learning how to balance American, Somali, and Muslim identities followed by the image of Zahra and Miriam riding a camel yet attending to their phones during an Eid celebration at Noor mosque (Figure 9) depicts the intersection of nomadic culture, Western values, and Islamic traditions in a playful manner. The text more often represents conflict and difference, but the photos represent joy and assurance. While a complex account of Somali women’s experiences of identity in Columbus might be achieved through text as Crosby (2006) and Magan (2012) suggest, this account would not demonstrate the joy and creativity documented in the photos. The analysis

of complementary narratives (visual and written) offers a multi-faceted consideration of not only the subject at hand, but also the tension between text and image.

In addition to the analysis of complementary narratives, the consideration of individual and group accounts offers a mode of presenting the “multiple viewpoint,” which Mirzoeff (2000) states is a vital element of diasporic images. The multiple viewpoint is concerned with the polycentric vision located “between individuals and communities and culture in the process of dialogic interaction” (Shohat and Stam 1998, p. 46). Collaborative research and art making cultivates a presentation that is both individual and collective; the exhibit is a collection of individual stories and images, yet is also read as a single text. Considering the relationship between individual works and accounts to the whole exhibit is an example of dialogic interaction. The image of S. (Figure 6) is a visual representation of individual study and interpretation of the Quran. However, its placement between multiple stories of learning about Islam in *Religious Knowledge*, other images of women practicing Islam through prayer (Figures 4 and 7) and giving back (Figure 5), and examples of deviating from the norm with regard to *hijab* and behavior interrupts its finality and the image of S. becomes a partial account of a young Somali woman’s religious identity and practice. The multiple forms of presentation avoid a generalized and fixed presentation of diasporic identity by presenting individual accounts within a collaborative and collective exhibit that recognizes collectivity as well as the fragmentation of experiences. Using arts-based forms of research, such as narrative participatory photography, and presenting them as a group of individual experiences, acknowledges both group and individual experiences of negotiating American, Somali, and Muslim identities of young women in the diaspora.

VII. Conclusion

Participatory arts-based methods such as narrative participatory photography offer a unique way to engage Somalis in research about their experiences and lives in the diaspora. While methods such as photo-voice offer a solid framework for engaging community members in research through photography, narrative participatory photography offers a method of inquiry that takes into consideration Somali cultural traditions as well as methods already being employed in other arts initiatives within the diaspora. As found in the analysis of image and text,

the complementary, often tense complexities between stories/words and images offer a more comprehensive look at the women's experiences and mirror the tensions between the multiple cultures and communities with which they identify. I encourage further consideration of arts initiatives in the diaspora as important sites of ethnographic, participatory, and arts-based research to give further insight into the lives and experiences of Somalis in the diaspora and diasporic identity. Moreover, I suggest further use of arts-based and participatory research methods to (1) analyze these complementary narratives and (2) attend to the multiple viewpoint present in all diasporic images. Arts-based, participatory research methods such as narrative participatory photography can be used to engage more Somalis in research, educate others, and offer more specific examples of experiences to complement other scholars' work. Most importantly though, this work honors individual experiences while critically and creatively identifying the common threads in the efforts of participants to define and express their identity as Somali women in the diaspora.

Notes

1. Kayla's poem can be retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYLl8Lt1L8>.
2. There are many valuable texts addressing issues of documentary practices with immigrant, refugee, and diaspora communities such as Demos (2013), Grossman and O'Brien (2007), and Mirzoeff (2000).
3. From Muna, project interview, October 27, 2012; project interview, October 28, 2013a; S., project interview, January 19, 2013; Zam Zam, DSVU, 2014.
4. From Asha, Bahja, Miriam, and Zam Zam, project interview, October 28, 2013a; Hoda, project interview, November 9, 2012; Tiilikainen, 2007.

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